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1967/09/26

MEMORANDUM

99

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 2, 1967

Pl. p3, 4, 5, 7

~~TOP SECRET~~

EYES ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your weekly luncheon on September 26, 1967 in the second floor dining room.

Those who attended were: Secretary McNamara, Secretary Katzenbach, CIA Director Helms, Walt Rostow, George Christian.

The meeting began at 1:15 p.m. The meeting ended at 2:35 p.m.

Attachment.

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BY DCH ON 12-1-81

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Meeting began: 1:15 p.m.
Meeting ended: 2:35 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH
SECRETARY McNAMARA
SECRETARY KATZENBACH
CIA DIRECTOR HELMS
MR. WALT ROSTOW
MR. GEORGE CHRISTIAN

September 26, 1967
Second floor dining room

President: Walt, did you get the information to Senator Dirksen and Senator Mansfield? They are battling with Senator Case today.

Rostow: Yes sir.

President: Nick, did you get that information on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? I want the opinions and precedents on this. If Senator Russell were able, he could present this case very effectively. Russell said it was hypocritical to say they did not understand the resolution when it was passed.

I had an interesting conversation with [redacted] 1-301(b)(3) [redacted] He said he did not see how we could win the war without more public statements. He said there is a need to repeat statements over and over. He thinks we should repeat again how we got into Vietnam, why we are there, and what our purpose is. The luncheon group agreed that more of this needed to be done.

Nick, isn't it bad for those newspapers to be closed down in Saigon?

Katzenbach: There are many newspapers out there. These are all small circulation papers, but yes, it does have some negative effects -- more here in the U.S. than out there.

Helms: It's what our newspapers do to it that is critical.

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President: What about peace negotiations? How are the contacts doing?

Katzenbach: The last message sounded more plaintiff than negative. The channel is still there. The question is will they talk to Henry while bombing continues. He will talk to a non-official rather than to officials.

We suggest they start talking about either substance of stopping or how we get together for talks.

The odds are against talks at this time. I think there is a possibility, although not a very good one. The chances of getting Vietnam resolved before November, 1968, depends on our ability to get talks going.

We should try even if there is little hope for success. Even if you were to get them started and nothing happened it would be good. We would step down some if secret talks began. I do not see a better channel at the moment. I do not see anything better.

In South Vietnam, Helms' people have picked up a man and let him go. This also may work.

Rostow: Interruped to mention that Senator Muskie had called concerned over a CBS report that 85% of the Vietnamese election overseeing group thought the Thieu-Ky election was a fraud. The President asked Director Helms to check this and if it is not true, get the information to the Senator.

Secretary Katzenbach:

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President: Is there anything new on General Wheeler's condition?

Secretary McNamara: He is doing fine. He is in the hospital today for an examination.

Secretary McNamara: On targets, the JCS recommends elimination of restrictions around Hanoi. They recommend a strike on Phuc Yen airbase, and they want restrike authority on targets previously hit inside the 10-mile circle. There are 25 targets which have been authorized but not struck.

In my opinion, it would be harmful to the Paris talks if we were to intensify the bombing. It is unlikely that the military progress which they would produce would be great enough to change attitudes toward negotiations.

There have been two questions sent to Hanoi:

1. Do we understand that if we stop the bombing that within two days you will go to the conference table?

2. Will you talk to Kissinger if we hold the current level of bombing?

While there are these discussions I would recommend against additional bombing. We have enough targets for another week.

[redacted] 1-301(d) (5)

We have only lost three aircraft to MIGs, yet we have downed seven of theirs. There are only 27 MIGs in North Vietnam at the present time.

I talked to Ambassador Thompson. He doubted that the Soviets would respond at this time. If we hit it once, we will have to hit it again.

Rostow: We are keeping them busy for the moment repairing the bridges and the thermal power plant. Let's give them another week to play out the string.

President: I see nothing coming from this.

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Rostow: I do not see any connection between bombing and negotiations.

Katzenbach: I do not think we are going to get negotiations by bombing.

President: I do not see holding off again. What have we gotten out of this so far.

Katzenbach: We have gotten into communications with them. There have been no communications since February of this year.

The tone of the communications was less strident than before.

It is important to try to get them to talk.

It's worth doing, even at the price of not hitting within the Hanoi circle.

If you measure bombing against the possibilities of the channels, they have a better public stance than we do.

President: What are the arguments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

McNamara: The power plant is 50% operative and they are rebuilding it. The two Hanoi bridges are again being used for traffic. They believe it is important to hit the industrial targets to help the war effort.

In my opinion, none of these are strong arguments.

President: Who is influencing Hanoi?

Katzenbach: We are making them believe they can't achieve their goals in the way they wanted.

The difficulty has been in bombing limited targets. There is enough destructions to make it look like we are trying to defeat Hanoi and can't.

I do not think we should stop bombing the North unless we can get to the bargaining table. A pause may help publicly.

I favor a pause between now and February.

President: I do too. But we are too quick to pick up what any professor may get going. I think we should get those targets now.

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A pause won't change the political situation. It will give them an answer though that we are prepared to go the last mile.

But I do want to get all those targets before a pause.

McNamara: We are not going to be able to have a pause without the military saying there still are targets to be hit.

Katzenbach: Don't step up the bombing and then pause.

Helms: I do not agree that by not bombing in a particular location it will have any effect on talks.

President: History may make us look silly on this whole thing.

We pull out of Hanoi any bombing for six weeks to let people get in. Then they never go in.

McNamara: The serious problem is that you must show the American people that you are willing to walk that last mile. You sent a good formula. No American President could expect you to do more.

But we do not pay much for keeping this going.

President: I think they are playing us for suckers. They have no more intention of talking than we have of surrendering. In my judgment everything you hit is important. It makes them hurt more.

Relatively few men are holding down a lot of men. I think we should get them down and keep them down. We will give them an opportunity to speak and talk if they will.

If we believe that we should bomb, then we should hit their bridges, their power plants, and other strategic targets outside the ones which we have ruled off-limits.

We get nothing in return for giving all we have got. But I guess a pause won't hurt because the weather is bad anyway. But I do want to get all

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the targets hit that we dare approve. Then we will make public the pause that Thieu had mentioned. If they do not talk we will have to go to more drastic steps.

We are losing support in this country. The people just do not understand the war. But nobody can justify holding off for five weeks. We must look at this thing very carefully.

I agree with Dick Helms. It makes no difference in their minds where we hit.

Hanoi alone will not do it. They still want permanent cessation, their four points, and what they have said.

How do you wrap up the channel if it is getting us nowhere.

McNamara: I would suggest, in that case, that the President authorize Phuc Yen today, then watch all replies from Bo or M & A so you can terminate the exchange if nothing comes of it.

President: I am ready to do that. Wait a week. If they give any indication I am ready to do it.

Katzenbach: Bo could say I'll talk with Kissinger. It makes a difference what we do and say. We should adjust our messages so they can do something or call it off.

President: Nick, give me a paper on what hopes you and State see in this thing. I just do not see them. But I want a paper on this. You already have given them five weeks.

Katzenbach: But it did not cost us anything.

President: You built a big umbrella which gives them a chance to rebuild. I would deny them that. But let me see it. Write down what we have to gain.

Helms: I do not think it will pay to continue holding off hitting Hanoi. Let's get the public relations aspect out. Let Bob go ahead and tell his people that we will destroy every military target in North Vietnam with the exception of Hanoi and China restricted areas.

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We have offered a formula related to bombing. This was unconditional. This could lead to talks. They said no. We regard this as their answer for the time being.

We must design a scenario that would lead to a pause.

President: I want Katzenbach to prepare me a memo on why he thinks we should continue this channel, a scenario for wrapping it up, because we have met twice with a firm no.

We owe it to our men to do everything we can. We're not.

Katzenbach: We are talking about a very small area in exchange for what we are doing.

President: But all of this adds up. It is a question of which one of us can last the longest.

McNamara: On the day we gave a message to them we hit Hanoi harder that day than ever before. It was 21-22-23 of August when we hit Hanoi hard. It was the same time as the message was sent. Your formula was excellent. You have a good record since this.

President: We see nothing coming out of it.

McNamara: If the resumption of bombing does not terminate the talks you would want to keep it going in Paris.

Katzenbach: The tone of these talks is better than ever before. [redacted] (4) 1-301 (c) [redacted] Bo has been careful not to slam the door. He has not been permitted to talk to an official American while the bombing is going on. He said to tell A & M.

There then was a discussion of signing the space treaty on October 10. Question was whether or not it should be in Washington or New York. President expressed interest in signing it in Washington because it shows that progress can be made while Vietnam is going on.

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